

THE EMPEROR'S NEW RELIGION

BY OLE WOLF

The Church of Satan has caused outrage and extensive media attention since its inception as the boldest champion of Satan in the “occult explosion” peaking in the 1960es, and for better or for worse has become synonymous with modern Satanism. It asserts that Satanism is a unique philosophy distinctly tailored to man’s life on Earth which, if followed, has the potential to increase the follower’s earthly success.

This paper investigates the Church of Satan, its ideology, and its practices, and observes that the Church of Satan includes the same dynamics as can be observed in many other religions. In addition, the Church of Satan appears to deliberately mislead its members via conflicting policy statements and communication.

The paper concludes that the Church of Satan is a personality cult that seems to have less interest in maintaining an ideology than in gaining members, and that the Church of Satan may be no more than the invention of a skilled con artist who saw an unused opportunity.

1. The Church of Satan and Its Ideology

When Anton LaVey (1930 - 1997, born Howard Stanton Levey) founded the Church of Satan reporting Walpurgisnacht (April 31) in 1966 as its birthday,[†] the organization described the event as the “opening the floodgates to a revolution” and proclaimed the event as “Year One,” announcing a new era in History [1].

Anton LaVey had regularly studied occultism at home together with his so-called “Magic Circle” of devotees a few years earlier, and it was this group that was to become the Church of Satan [2, p. 29].

Membership figures are kept secret by the Church of Satan, leaving friends and foes guessing at membership figures differing by several orders of magnitude. The membership card

provides no indication of the size of the organization, as all membership cards issued today display the number 100261 (see Figure 1). While the actual membership number probably lies between the guesses of just a few hundred and several millions, and while the influence of the Church of Satan is probably less than hinted by the organization itself and more than reported by its enemies (anti-cult fanatics excluded), the Church of Satan has established itself as the organization that is usually mentioned in books describing Satanism regardless of opinion. Anton LaVey himself is usually mentioned in company with names such as Eliphas Lévi, Abbé Boullard, and Aleister Crowley, all of whom are considered leading figures in so-called “traditional” (or “religious,” or “mythical”) and “modern” Satanism.

Hagiographies such as *The Secret Life of a Satanist* [3] and *The Church of Satan* [4], both by the Church of Satan’s former High Priestess and Anton LaVey’s third wife, Blanche Barton[‡] (Grand Priestess of the Temple), provide a col-

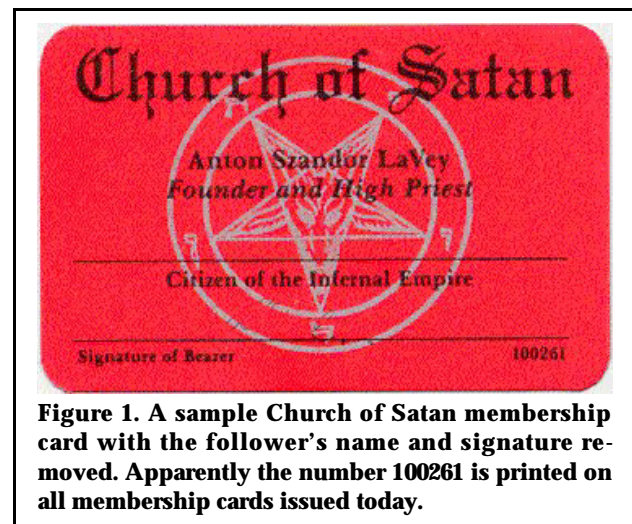


Figure 1. A sample Church of Satan membership card with the follower’s name and signature removed. Apparently the number 100261 is printed on all membership cards issued today.

[†] 1966 coincided with “year one” declared in Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby*. Anton LaVey claimed to have been involved in the 1968 movie production as both a technical advisor and as an actor. Neither claim is supported—neither the detailed biography of the movie nor the size of the costume for LaVey’s purported role lend credibility to the claim.

[‡] Some critics have suggested that Blanche Barton’s hagiographies of Anton LaVey and his organization were not written by Barton but LaVey himself. Comparing the literary style of the books with her style after LaVey’s death lends credibility to Barton as the original author, albeit strongly inspired by LaVey.

orful and haunting picture of a person qualified as no less than the Devil's right hand man.

The strong publicity that the Church of Satan and its founder have received is itself no indication that the Church of Satan represents Satanism beyond its own claim to the title as the Devil's henchmen, however.

It can be argued that because in certain aspects of its literature the Church of Satan references Christianity in its departure from the creeds usually associated with common Christian ideology, in that sense at least it qualifies as an anti-Christian organization and hence by Christian definition, Satanic. In particular, the first section (most of which was adapted with few modifications from Ragnar Redbeard's *Might is Right* [5]) of *The Satanic Bible* [6] by Anton LaVey has strong anti-Christian proclamations. Anton LaVey has later explained that this section was intended as an eye-opener [5, p. 5].

1.1 Satanic Ideology

Anton LaVey has claimed inspiration from, and ideological parallels with, several sources with leanings toward atheistic or non-Christian morality, including Mark Twain, Jack London, P. T. Barnum, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ragnar Redbeard, Orrin Klapp, Niccolò Machiavelli, Charles Finney, Adolf Hitler, Charles Darwin, Ayn Rand, Herbert Spencer, H. G. Wells, Yefimovitch Rasputin, George Bernard Shaw, Sigmund Freud, Ambrose Bierce, Sir Basil Zaharoff, and Voltaire, to name just a few [3, p. 24; 5, p. 5-6; 2, p. 492, 741; 7, p. xii; 8, p. 51; 9]. Satanism, according to the Church of Satan, is a fusion of the thoughts expressed by these authors and philosophers, etc.:

[Anton LaVey's] ideas evolved from his enthusiasm for Satanic sympathizers and reprobates like George Bernard Shaw, John Milton, Goethe, [...] peppered with a liberal dose of the Johnson, Smith & Co. Catalogue of Jokes, Tricks and Novelties. [7, p. xii]

That is, although neither thought alone was novel, no one before Anton LaVey had connected the dots to synthesize a new religion based on the thoughts combined.

The Church of Satan's ideology states that man alone is responsible for his own success, and that there is no reward in Heaven or punishment in Hell for man's intents and doings on Earth. As *The Satanic Bible* states:

1. Life is the great indulgence—death, the great abstinence. Therefore, make the most of life—HERE AND NOW.

2. There is no heaven of glory bright, and no hell where sinners roast. Here and now is our day of torment! Here and now is our day of joy! Here and now is our opportunity. [6, p. 33]

Man is thus given with the chance to live in indulgence only while alive, and had better make full use of it while it lasts.[†] This is a recurring theme in the second section of *The Satanic Bible*.

Followers of the Church of Satan are encouraged to make that of Satanism which suits each individual follower's best needs:

As far as Satanists are concerned, taking the way things are and taking what suits you best and dwelling on it—that's what it is all about. [10, p. 234]

The Church of Satan generally uses Satan as a symbol of man's nature as that of any other animal, and rejects the belief in Satan as an anthropomorphic being. Some of Anton LaVey's closer associates, however, seem to have been told a different story. For example, Michael Aquino, who resigned from the Church of Satan and formed a new organization, The Temple of Set in 1975, explains that the belief in a literal Devil:

... was *axiomatic* to all of our [Aquino's and LaVey's] conversations and collaborations [11]

and Blanche Barton explained to The San Francisco Chronicle at a press conference following Anton LaVey's death in 1997 that Anton LaVey had believed in the Devil [12]. In an article in *The Occult Explosion* Anton LaVey had acknowledged that:

... many members of the Church of Satan who are mystically inclined prefer to think of Satan in a very real, anthropomorphic way. Of course we do not discourage this, because we realize that it is very important to many individuals to ritualistically conceptualize a well-wrought picture of their mentor or tutelary divinity. [2, p. 740]

He ventured on to explain that:

In answer to those who would label us "Devil worshippers" or ... Satan worshippers, I must say that Satan demands *study*, not worship. [2, p. 740]

Note that Anton LaVey did not reject the belief in Satan, only the *worship* of the deity.

The Satanic Bible defines Satan somewhat ambiguously as a unified God (that is, not a god among others) which:

... is seen as the balancing factor in nature, and not being concerned with suffering. [6, p. 40]

[†] In contrast to popular opinion among Church of Satan followers there is no implication that there is no life after death; the text only states that once one is dead, one will be unable to indulge in one's desires.

and

Most Satanists do not accept Satan as an anthropomorphic being with cloven hooves, a barbed tail, and horns. He merely represents a force of nature ... [which] is an untapped reservoir that few can make use of... [6, p. 62]

This definition, in conjunction with the term “god,” lends itself to a theistic or deistic perception of Satan in addition to the atheistic persuasion also presented in the book.

The Church of Satan’s Grotto Master application requires prospective “Grotto Masters,” who are individuals that lead a local chapter of Church of Satan followers, to perform a self-initiation ritual:

15. Before you complete this application—when you sense the time is right—perform a ritual (using the basic elements described in *The Satanic Bible*) to petition Satan and the Dark Legions to accept you as a Grotto Master. Write down the ritual you performed and the results, if any. [13]

Again, this ritual, requesting an infernal mandate, has theistic overtones.

Part of the Church of Satan’s ideology specifically appeals to people that feel a need to bolster their egos, feeling that they are more important than their social recognition reflects. *The Satanic Bible* provides a salt water injection to such people’s egos with the assertion that Satanists are intrinsically superior people. Church of Satan literature, such as *The Black Flame*, bulge with racist, fascist, and Nazi-oriented essays and imagery, all of which are recurring themes among people whose self-esteem is out of proportion with their physical or intellectual abilities. Organizations promising religious or similar emotionally gratifying compensation for lacking achievements thrive on such people. The Church of Satan acknowledges an emotional link between its ideology and Nazism:

Barton: It’s an unholy alliance ... The anti-Christian strength of National Socialist Germany is part of the appeal to Satanists. ...

LaVey: ... The aesthetics of National Socialism and Satanism dovetail. [10, p. 236]

Anton LaVey states in *The Satanic Bible* that there is evidence of an emerging Satanic age. At that time there was increasing focus on personal freedom, relaxed sexual morals, rebellion against authorities, and iconoclastic behavior, all cardinal to the hippie movement that was gaining foothold in the years before the Church of Satan was created. The first three clauses in the Church of Satan’s official, semi-political pro-

gram, *Pentagonal Revisionism*, which was published in *The Devil’s Notebook* [14, p. 93] demand stratification (which is a form of meritocracy that rejects undeserved power), taxation of churches, and separation of church and state. These issues were also important in the “freedom movement” of the 1960es. Interest in Anton LaVey’s pet projects, the construction of artificial human companions and total environments (i.e., fantasy worlds) had already peaked a decade earlier when robots were the big hit on the screen and popular literature, and the contemporary fashion dictated a new home with a characteristic departure from traditional furnishing.

Whether the evidence reflected a “zeitgeist” that was genuinely indicative of an emerging Satanic age or whether Anton LaVey simply defined social trends at that time as Satanic is difficult to tell. However, lending itself well to the prevalent social trends the Church of Satan was certainly a product of its time.

1.2 The Satanic Bible

The Satanic Bible formally defines the Church of Satan’s ideology, and the Church of Satan refers to the book as:

a diabolical book, the basis for our philosophy. [1]

The book was released in 1969, three years after the establishment of the Church of Satan. Anton LaVey explains that he was prompted to write *The Satanic Bible* by his agent and publisher’s suggestion with a tight deadline:

Then [...] came the official commission to write a “Satanic Bible”. My agent and publisher wanted the material I had already printed in tract form, with additional stuff, to make up the “Bible” as quickly as possible. [5, p. 4]

The Satanic Bible is comprised of, in the following order:

1. An anti-Christian diatribe. This section seems to appeal especially to those that were brought up in Christian homes and are fed up with that religion. The Church of Satan explains that this section is a wake-up call that is only necessary for some readers.
2. A level-headed refutation of Christian dogma; an assertion that there is no afterlife and hence no reward or punishment after one dies; and elaborations on different facets of a life lived accordingly. This section contains many examples of how even seemingly conflicting behavior is Satanic according to the

author, and effectively virtually any behavior is inherently Satanic.

3. Three recipes for magic focusing on aggression, lust, and compassion. The magic in the third section obviously appeals to people that enjoy magic settings, but the Church of Satan accepts that some followers do not feel so inclined.

The Church of Satan states that belief in literal demons is permitted within the confines of the ritual chamber and abandoned outside of the chamber. Presumably this argument also holds in rituals such as “The Satanic ‘Baptism,’” [15, p. 212] which directly refers to the literal Satan. It is a valid argument, but the dual acceptance of belief and non-belief is also an effective tool for appealing to such strongly diverging groups of people as theists and atheists simultaneously.

4. A listing of eighteen “Enochian Keys.” Ironically, this section contains the very occult-nick bunk that Anton LaVey prides *The Satanic Bible* as being devoid of in the preface of the book. Both readers despising such bunkery and readers desiring it are generously satisfied.

The Satanic Bible thus represents an occult-nick slam dunk: most readers will agree with certain portions of *The Satanic Bible* as long as they are either atheists on a rational level, deists with symbolism but no supernatural beliefs, or even theists believing in God and/or Satan but not particularly caring about their sentences in their afterlives.

Indeed, because most readers can find something they agree with in *The Satanic Bible* almost regardless of personal belief, and because they are encouraged to pick and choose those items they agree with, the only obstacle to being a Satanist per the Church of Satan’s requirements lies in the readers’ potential unwillingness to accept the label “Satanist.” This conclusion is supported by Blanche Barton’s welcoming statement on the official Church of Satan Web page, where she explains that:

The philosophy really isn’t that esoteric and doesn’t take much pondering to understand. But it’s that looming figure in the shadows, that majestic silhouette of Satan—leathery wings outstretched, standing proudly, backlit by the flames of Hell—that people find... disquieting. [16]

Church of Satan officials have argued that parts of the *The Satanic Bible* were intended as sincere philosophy while other parts were in-

tended to mislead the rubes begging to be mocked and derided. According to William Gidney (Priest of the Church of Satan):

The Church of Satan champions the Machiavellian ethic of misdirection: You should try actually reading the philosophical content of *The Satanic Bible* far more carefully. What confusion we inspire is of no interest to us. [17]

Hence, the inclusion of the so-called Enochian Keys, a hoax invented by John Dee and Edward Kelley, in *The Satanic Bible* might be an ironic attempt at misdirection put there to confuse the rubes, but any references to Machiavellian ethics would be sincere. Presumably only the elite (that is, whoever happened to read *The Satanic Bible*) would be able to realize that the Crowley-inspired parts were misdirection, while the Redbeard and Machiavelli musings were sincere—or vice versa. Each follower of the Church of Satan is left with the impression that he or she and a few others understand the true meaning of Satanism, and everyone else does not.

It is more plausible, however, that when Anton LaVey wrote *The Satanic Bible*, he decided to take a dash of Crowley (whose interest in Dee and Kelley is well documented) from here, and a dash of Machiavelli and Nietzsche from there, and bake his Satanic cake appealing to the widest audience possible.

The Church of Satan states that the contradictions are only apparent:

It is then up to the rank and file members, as well as anyone else who has an interest in this material, to analyze these ideas and synthesize the apparent contradictions into a “Third Side” that is the essence of Satanic understanding. [18]

Or, in other words, the reason that there are contradictions is that there are none; and by perceiving the ideology as ambiguous, one has not gained Satanic understanding. As in Hans Christian Andersen’s popular story, *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, where people would rather not admit to being stupid not seeing the emperor’s marvelous new (missing) clothes, followers of the Church of Satan would probably rather not admit they have no “Satanic understanding.”

Inevitably individual Satanists will reach different interpretations. The Church of Satan continues:

Will everyone arrive at the same synthesis? No. Surprised? You shouldn’t be, as Satanism is a religion which embraces the practice of individualism, not demanding that all its members have some kind of lock-step sameness. [18]

Different and contrary individual interpretations do not warrant religious unity, however. People do not unite in *disagreement*—not unless they join hands in a shared disagreement with something entirely different, such as Satanists' pet demon: Christianity. If the Church of Satan does indeed unite its followers despite opposing interpretations, their unity is not about its ideology at all.

1.3 Satanic Rituals and Magic

The Satanic Bible formally defines magic as:

The change in situations or events in accordance with one's will, which would, using normally accepted methods, be unchangeable. [6, p. 110]

The statement echoes Aleister Crowley's definition, and in admitting to a rather broad definition Anton LaVey refers to the equivalence between the perception of magic and science, possibly borrowing Athur C. Clarke's famous Third Law, which stipulates that "[a]ny sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Most interpretations ranging from mysticism to die hard science are thereby covered.

Anton LaVey asserted that magic falls into three basic categories: anger, lust, and compassion [6, pp. 114-115]—feelings that are often difficult to cope with in many societies. Two sections of *The Satanic Bible* are devoted to the practice of magic. One section contains three recipes for the aforementioned three categories of magic. The other section lists the Enochian Keys. Anton LaVey has later conceded that he chose to include the Enochian Keys in *The Satanic Bible* simply because he was told that they were dangerous to mention [5, p. 4].

When the Church of Satan uses the term "ceremony," it means "ritual" in sociology. When it uses the term "ritual," it means "magic" in sociology. This document uses the sociological nomenclature.

The rituals and magic that are publicly available—the three basic types in *The Satanic Bible* and the ones in *The Satanic Rituals*—are free to use by anyone. The three basic types of magic can be performed solitarily, and can be expected to be the most widespread Satanic magic based on the ease of performance, and on the few ritual settings and/or participants required.

The Church of Satan's rituals, as explained by Anton LaVey in *The Satanic Rituals*, are intended to sustain the Satanic ideology:

Generally, a ritual [i.e., magic] is used to *attain*, while a ceremony [i.e., a ritual] serves to *sustain*. [15, p. 17]

Rituals serve as self-programming devices that maintain the follower's dedication to the religion, and they have a transfusing effect on the person's life.

The Satanic Rituals includes the following rituals:

1. *Le Messe Noir*—a rite of passage intended to rid the follower of Catholic Christian dogma.
2. *L'air Epais*—an initiation ritual in which the participant symbolically dies and is reborn as a Satanist.
3. *Das Tierdrama*—a reminder of one's animal heritage.
4. *Homage to Tchoth*—draws inspiration from Russian folklore of various demons, which are summoned during the ritual.
5. *The Ceremony of the Nine Angles*—inspired by H. P. Lovecraft, it is intended to "emphasize potential."
6. *The Call to Cthulhu*—also inspired by H. P. Lovecraft, it "reflects the dimness of an almost forgotten past."
7. *The Satanic Baptisms*—baptism rituals for children and adults.

Rituals 4, 5, and 6 have no clear purpose. Michael Aquino, the author of rituals 5 and 6, explains that the fledgling organization's theory regarding rituals was not all that deep or thought-through, and that the purpose of some rituals was only to act as a vehicle for the emotional or intellectual stimulation or pleasure of the participants [11]. Given no explanation of their purpose in *The Satanic Rituals*, it is likely that these three rituals fall into that category.

Rituals actualize ideology, that is, they are physical manifestations of the abstract thoughts expressed by the ideology. Like birthdays are times where the birthday celebrant may think ahead or back, rituals typically act as reflective moments where participants stop and relate to their nature and situation. Rituals are not considered in the everyday life, but require participants to stop and *act*. It is not clear how inspiration from Russian folklore and Lovecraftian fiction actualizes the Satanic ideology as outlined in *The Satanic Bible*.

It is remarkable that rites of passage, such as wedding and death, admission to adulthood (the Church of Satan has a concept of children vs. adults, as evidenced by *The Satanic Baptisms*, which come in those two forms), etc. are absent from the available material. Such rituals serve to sustain a religion and reinforce its ideology.

Michael Aquino's explanation above is believable, but after 36 years of existence it is surprising to conclude that rituals that actualize the ideology still have that little weight. This topic is discussed further in Section 1.4, *Lacking Rituals*.

A complete analysis of the Church of Satan's rituals is beyond the scope of this article, but compared with rituals known from other religions the Church of Satan's rituals are considerably shallow: there is only limited correspondence between the Church of Satan's ideology and what the rituals actualize; the rituals do not meet common needs; and they are based on terse research, not in-depth refinements and studies.

The Church of Satan's magic consists of substitute actions for goals that the participant cannot readily attain in real life. In keeping with the notion of living here and now, magic in *The Satanic Bible* concentrates on meeting very short term goals, eliminating present frustration with sexual desire, aggression, or compassion, as mentioned earlier.[†]

1. *Lust* magic—to get sex.
2. *Destruction* magic—to get revenge.
3. *Compassion* magic—to help someone.

The Satanic Rituals adds the following magic:

4. *Die elektrischen* [sic] *Vorspiele*—magic intended to produce far-reaching, social changes.
5. *The Statement of Shaitan*—magic intended to influence human events.

Presumably it is left to the magician's discretion which social changes or influences are desired in this magic, because *The Satanic Rituals* provides no description.

There seems to be no magic for individual long term goals.

When a follower performs magic or rituals in solitude, the follower is not quite alone. Like when a believer in stone healing clenches his hands around a translucent stone and whispers a prayer by himself knowing that many other believers also do this, it creates a sense of community and belonging, even if each believer is

alone. The followers may be alone, but they are alone—together.

Such magic and rituals bind the followers together much like a regular church community does, only without the social interaction. The knowledge that others perform the very same rituals also creates the belief that the ritual is more important, or more effective, than if it were a home made ritual. The follower gets the impression that his behavior is meaningful, and it gains validity by social proof (i.e., the assumption that if many do it, it is inherently correct or makes sense).

Social proof also persuades people to engage in a behavior that they would not otherwise have displayed. Dressing up funny is less embarrassing in a group of similarly dressed people than alone, for example; and followers that feel awkward about a ritual would similarly feel encouraged to complete it anyway knowing that many others do it. The effect is self-perpetuating.

The Church of Satan's solitary rituals thus contribute to a sense of solidarity and community, and they satisfy the followers' desire for rituals, if any.

1.4 Lacking Rituals

As of this writing, the Church of Satan is 36 years old according to its reported foundation date, and obviously the religion has not yet had time to evolve significantly. It is nonetheless striking that certain elements of the religion that are often absent in new religions are *still* missing. A religion that is more than a generation old should have had its share already of couples desiring to get married or individuals that have passed away. A wedding ritual has been written [2, p. 604], but for all practical purposes it does not exist.[‡] In spite of an expected demand, rituals concerning marriage and death are thus effectively still absent.* Of rituals traditionally classified as rites of passage—events such as birth, marriage, and death—only (voluntary) baptism rituals are available for initiation of

[†] It is a religious question whether this magic actually works, but if the chief purpose of the magic is to vent frustrations and “get it out of one's system,” the magic probably has some self-therapeutic value.

[‡] The wedding ritual may have been published in past issues of the Church of Satan's newsletter, *The Cloven Hoof*, but back issues prior to no. 126 are not available. The ritual is reproduced in Michael Aquino's *The Church of Satan* [2, p. 604], but this book is not endorsed by the Church of Satan. The Church of Satan Web site explains which Enochian keys (listed in *The Satanic Bible*) are associated with different types of rituals, and associates keys 2, 7, and 13 with lust and weddings and key 11 with funerals, according to Anton LaVey [19]. Hence, a preparation for such rituals is available, but the rituals themselves are not available for the followers.

* Rituals concerning marriage and death may be said to be irrelevant to Satanism and therefore now ignored, but because religious people tend to carry old socio-religious habits with them as spiritual baggage when they switch religions, marriage and funeral are guaranteed to be a concern.

new followers. This one, and rituals for marriage, funerals, etc. would generally be the first ones to be made available for the followers of a religion.

The effective absence of such rituals even today suggests that followers of the Church of Satan either abandon their religion quickly or do not take their religion particularly seriously in spite of their sometimes quite belligerent outward determination. Alternatively, it is a sign that the Church of Satan's headcount is too low to enable such social events (couples never form, and friends or family members that die are never Satanists), or that the religion is strictly individualistic. The latter can be said to fit the Church of Satan's statement that the religion is individualistic, but it is improbable that two followers are so individualistic that they refuse to marry, and that they refuse to use their preferred religion in that situation.

The lacking rituals indicate that the religion has yet to make a lasting impact, but a need for such rituals may eventually arise if followers gain interest or the religion gains momentum, depending on the reason why the rituals are lacking.

Possibly the Church of Satan considers the only existing ritual too embarrassing for wide publication: the wedding ritual by Anton LaVey is unimpressive and quite short—about half a page—and devoid of virtually any effects.

Section 3, *Active Recruiting*, argues that the Church of Satan is motivated to recruit new followers, but existing followers are mostly deadwood in an economic and administrative sense, useful only as recruitment agents and combat units. It is therefore possible that the Church of Satan's primary interest lies in recruiting followers (who will be looking for Satanic baptism rituals), but its desire to *keep* followers (who will be looking for wedding, funeral, and other similar rituals) is slim or even against its own interest.

The Church of Satan explains that a wedding ritual can only be performed by a Church of Satan appointed official:

The Official marriage Rite used by the Church of Satan was authored by High Priest Gilmore and is not available online or to members or the public. It is now only

presented to members of the Priesthood of Mendes who are about to perform it. [20]

The explanation also reveals that apparently the original wedding ritual by Anton LaVey has now been replaced with a new one by Peter Gilmore (High Priest of the Church of Satan), which according to the Church of Satan is to be published in Peter Gilmore's planned book, *Satanic Scriptures*[†] [20].

This requirement ostensibly provides the Church of Satan with an ability to exercise a certain control, albeit very limited in scope, or the Church of Satan may be keeping the ritual private to make it seem tantalizing as “forbidden fruit.” Whatever the reason, the Church of Satan evidently does not expect its followers to heed its own warning in the *Satanic Bunco Sheet*:

2. Look out for jargon and secrets to which only the “initiated” can be privy. Once you're processed through the lengthy and strictly-enforced “degree system,” you'll discover there are really no answers, just more gobbledygook. [21]

2. A New Religion

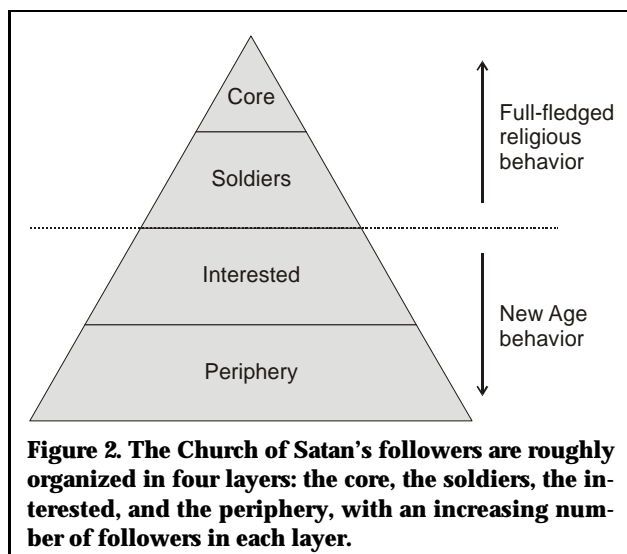
The Church of Satan has referred to its ideology as a religion [22]. Although the founder may have had ulterior motives as indicated in the following chapters, it is ultimately the behavior of the organization that determines whether the movement qualifies as a religion. The Sai Baba movement is a religion, for example, regardless of the motives and moral or legal integrity of the founder, whose “miracles” have been exposed as clumsy stage magic in video clips.

The Church of Satan is organized as illustrated in Figure 2. At the top level of the organization, the core is comprised of a relatively small group of people, which handles administrative tasks and issues guidelines. The Church of Satan has historically referred to its core group as “The Council of Nine”:

[T]he *Council of Nine* [...] is the ruling body of the organization [1]

It is not clear whether it is comprised of nine individuals, and who these individuals are, but recently the core group seems to have included Blanche Barton, Peter Gilmore, Peggy Nadramia (High Priestess), and Jeff Nagy (Magister) [23]. Only the core group has decisive power.

[†] *Satanic Scriptures* will reportedly be a compilation of essays written by Peter Gilmore in various magazines. If so, it will resemble Anton LaVey's *The Devil's Notebook* and *Satan Speaks!*, which are both compilations of essays that Anton LaVey wrote in various magazines.



The soldiers, at the second-highest level, follow the guidelines issued by the core and take strong interest in studying what they consider Satanic ideology. The core and the soldiers actively “present” Satanism to the outside world. Soldiers are not organized, but seem to occasionally or regularly talk with core group individuals. They are usually energetically loyal to the Church of Satan, as the following statement attests:

I am 100% loyal to the Church of Satan, and to its officials. I will obey WHATEVER and EVERY proclamation and regulation that they set forth within the CoS as a corporate body ...

... And again, I declare my loyalty AND OBEDIENCE not only to the CoS as a body, but also to certain officials such as HP Blanche Barton, Magister Peter H. Gilmore, ... [etc.]. They tell me to do something, and I do it...This is rare, but I am more than happy to do whatever they say. Any order they give me would never be for my detriment, only for my good. [24]

One level further down, interested followers have read *The Satanic Bible* and some other documents. They pursue further knowledge in what they happen to consider Satanic, but are generally unaware of guidelines issued by the core and do not actively represent Satanism.

Finally, the periphery is comprised of people that may have read *The Satanic Bible* and other documents but do not pursue other knowledge. Their membership of the Church of Satan has the same value to them as perhaps a piece of jewelry.

This organizational structure is common among religious groups. The structure is not formalized in the Church of Satan, and only serves to understand the dynamics of the Church of Satan as a religious organization.

2.1 Characteristic Religious Traits

The core and the soldiers display the characteristic traits of new religious movements founded by charismatic leaders:

1. They believe the founder can/could perform miracles or other supernatural feats, and the founder is perceived as somehow more than human. The founder is considered infallible, or the founder's faults are ignored or explained away. [25, pp. 184 - 218]

The founder, Anton LaVey, plays a key role in the religion. It is very common to find that followers of new religious groups, sects, or cults revere the founder as more than human, capable of miracles (or, in the case of Anton LaVey, curses), etc. with very flattering hagiographies written about the founder's life. They ignore rampant inconsistencies in the founder's professed past[†] and perceive ordinary actions as accomplishments only a demigod could have performed. They are quick to accredit general trends to the founder; for example, on the Church of Satan Web page Peter Gilmore contributes today's pleasure-oriented culture to Anton LaVey:

Indulgence was the “watchword” chosen by Anton LaVey when he founded the Church of Satan in 1966. I think a case may certainly be made that this concept has in the interim made a lasting impact on human society. As we look through the landscape of what is currently offered, we see that Dr. LaVey's vision has had broad cultural effect, as the amount of freedom for personal pleasure has abundantly increased on all levels of social strata. [26]

Anton LaVey's family is also seen as something special. His wives and daughters automatically received titles as High Priestesses by virtue of their family relation to him. Again this illustrates how blood is more important than both ideological issues and the meritocracy that the Church of Satan's “Pentagonal Revisionism” (see page 17) demands.[‡]

Anton LaVey plays a key role on another term as well. Religious groups enjoy references to authority. Older, well established religions refer to

[†] The tendency to wholly desert the possibility that the founder is an ordinary person or even a crook is common among followers of new religious movements. Even if a follower is presented with undeniable evidence somehow the follower does not comprehend the evidence. The thought is beyond their operational paradigm, beyond obscenity and blasphemy; it is *unthinkable*.

The Grotto

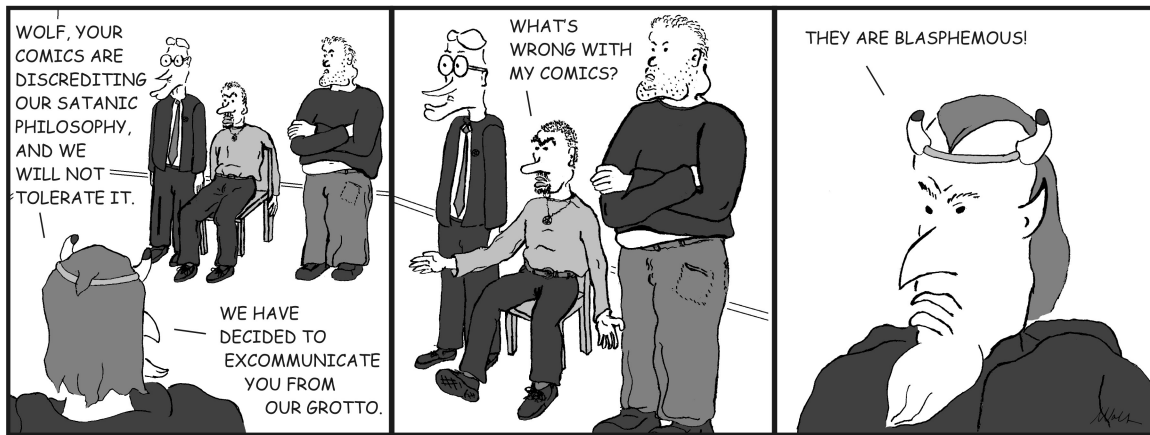


Figure 3. Only the Church of Satan's core group can provide a "true" interpretation of Anton LaVey's ambiguous writing. Anyone else making doctrinaire statements on the meaning of his texts is branded a heretic who falsifies Satanism and misleads people.

their ancient scripture (for example, Moslems refer to the Koran and Christians refer to the Bible), but most new religious groups refer to science, albeit mostly in the form of pseudoscience such as creation science or faith healing. The Church of Satan cannot refer to science, because most of its original claims of scientific foundation have been rejected by either the Church of Satan itself or modern science, or simply does not apply anymore in the post-1960es world; the Church of Satan has just Anton LaVey to lean on as an authority on Satanic religion. Being the single authority they can rely on, it is understandable that they defend him fang and claw.

The Church of Satan's current administration states that the interpretation of its ideology is straightforward:

9. ... Anton LaVey wrote *The Satanic Bible*, as well as his other works, in such a manner so that they can be directly understood—they are carnal and non-esoteric. No "teacher" is needed, no "guru" must interpret his words for you. [21]

This is only true to the extent that the Church of Satan's administration is exempt from this rule, however, because it takes on the role as interpreter of the "correct meaning" of Anton LaVey's writing when it excommunicates followers for reasons of differing interpretations of Anton LaVey's writing. One follower received

the following statements in his excommunication:

I don't think you've ever had much admiration or confidence in me personally, and you've shown yourself to be increasingly critical of our founder's ideas, as well. You've done your best to stir up dissension and purposely create misapprehensions about who we are and what Satanism advocates, despite attempts to guide, encourage and educate you. [27]

These statements demonstrate that criticism of the founder's ideas is frowned upon, and that the Church of Satan actively attempts to enforce a specific interpretation where "no 'teacher' is needed." The potential objections that this follower did not understand the ideology or was never appreciated are not valid, because Blanche Barton had written a personalized statement of appreciation for his efforts to the same person just half a year earlier [28].

Hence, only the Church of Satan's administration can provide a "true" interpretation of Anton LaVey's ambiguous writing. Anyone else making doctrinaire statements on the meaning of his texts is branded a heretic (as ironic as it may seem for a religion called Satanism—see Figure 3) who falsifies Satanism and misleads people.

2. There is strong contempt for organizations that follow the teachings of the founder without being followers of the founder's organization. [25, pp. 200-201]

‡ Today, several members of his family have become an embarrassment to the Church of Satan, which now does its best to downtone their influence: Diane Hegarty is never mentioned; Karla LaVey was suddenly never really important to the Church of Satan once she distanced herself from the organization to start The First Satanic Church; and Zeena LaVey was soon considered a dumb blonde when she parted with the Church of Satan, denounced her "unfather," and joined the Temple of Set.

It is common to find remarkably strong hostility against the new organization if eventually a group of people creates an organization of their own that follows the teaching of the founder without belonging to the founder's *own* organization.

The Church of Satan is evidently no exception from the above rules, as described in Section 5, *Desire for a Name Patent*, and Section 6, *Earned Hostility*. The Church of Satan officially disapproves of new organizations:

Founding your own "satanic organization" is a detriment to our movement. [29]

Sociologists have proposed the theory that by portraying the leader as a very special person, the followers feel that they themselves become very special people by proxy [25, p. 69]. To each follower, the story told about the leader and the new religious group becomes an intricate story about himself or herself: the followers substitute their perception of their identity with that of their leader in the sense that they merge their own identity with the leader's fabricated identity. This also happens between the followers and the group's perceived identity; that is, by believing that the group is superior each follower feels superior—and it does not matter to the follower that reality speaks against him or her.

Focus is thus not on the ideology but on the identity one assumes by being part of the group; or rather, on the identity that one assumes by being part of the *story* about the group. In short, they create a modern myth (or have it created for them) then play a part in it.

Consequently, if someone uses the leader's or the group's ideology outside of the *story* which is lock-stepped with the leader and the group (as is the case if someone founds a new organization that follows the ideology), the followers feel that they have been personally robbed, because their identity has become interwoven with the fictitious identity of the leader and the group. It is question of joining their *story*, not a question of joining their ideology. It has everything to do with the Church of Satan as an organization and its founder, and nothing to do with its ideology.

Supporting the above theory, the Church of Satan strongly emphasizes that *Anton LaVey* defined modern Satanism, placing Anton LaVey as the pivot point rather than the ill-defined ideology. For example:

Anton LaVey originally defined the roots of Satanism, and we will continue to place our heritage in the context he provided. [30]

The Church of Satan thus claims one true wayism based on *Anton LaVey*, disregarding the *ideology* of spin-off organizations as a goal in itself. Such a behavioral pattern is personality cult behavior in disguise.

With the story of the leader and organization so closely anchored in the followers' identity feelings, it is quite understandable that their reaction is that of someone that has been personally attacked if someone dares to criticize their leader or organization.

3. The religious group prefers to view itself as isolated from people outside of the group. [31, p. 34]

A religious group often sees itself as "saved" compared to people outside of the group. Its followers feel that the group's path to success (earthly or otherwise) is the best path for themselves. Groups may be more or less accepting of other groups, but usually do not acknowledge the routes taken by those groups as leading to the best final destination, wherever that be.

The Church of Satan consistently describes itself as an alien elite. Its followers are thought to constitute a peerless group of human beings whose conviction provides them with unique features above and beyond other human beings.

Followers that associate with other Satanic groups tend to be met with distrust in the Church of Satan, as is association with non-Satanic religious groups. There is no demand that its followers isolate themselves among fellow followers, as is customary among extremists groups. The Church of Satan is probably to be found among "moderate" groups in that regard, except for interaction with other Satanic organizations:

[I]f you choose to affiliate with any pseudo-Satanic or anti-Satanic groups, you may well find yourself disaffiliated from the Church of Satan. Forewarned is forearmed. [21]

Peter Gilmore summarizes the sentiments of both characteristics 2 and 3 in his refusal to cooperate with leading sociologist James R. Lewis in the field on a "Satanic Sourcebook":

I suspect that this book will be padded-out with a collection of writings coming from what I'd call the "pseudo-Satanic fringe," the usual online rabble who have no real outlet professionally or via websites which have any significant traffic, let alone any coherent philosophy.

As the truism goes, “You are known by the company you keep.” Thus, having our materials “rubbing elbows” with the scribbings of these people would only give them credence that they do not deserve. [32]

4. The religious group prefers to describe itself as a philosophy that straddles a boundary between psychology and religion, not as a religion. [33, p. 35]

The term “religion” has connotations that followers of religious groups often prefer to avoid. These groups typically make no direct use of anthropomorphic gods, which is a hallmark of traditional religions and silently implied by the term “religion.” Instead they see themselves as groups that follow a specific “philosophy” formulated by the founder. For example, The Transcendental Meditation program describes itself as a technique and spurns the term “religion” (and even went to court to avoid it), but sociologists agree that the organization is a religion [31, p. 20].

There are clear distinctions between religions and philosophies,[†] and the differences in the behavior of followers of a religion and followers of a philosophy are reasonably well defined among sociologists. Thus, although some religious groups may prefer the term “philosophy” to the term “religion” to avoid certain associations, it is the latter that is correct.

The Church of Satan does present itself as a religion, but with few exceptions its followers prefer to think of their religion as a philosophy. The official Church of Satan Web page calls it the “iconoclastic philosophy” [34], and Blanche Barton refers to the religion as “Dr. LaVey’s diabolical philosophy” [16].

Documents such as *The Satanic Bible* and the behavior of its followers would nonetheless categorize the Church of Satan as a religion.

5. The group believes to be founded on science rather than faith. [35, pp. 72-74; 33, p. 34]

A related tendency among religious groups is a belief in justification by science rather than faith. The Church of Scientology is an unmistak-

able example, as the reference to science is embedded in the religion’s very name, but many other groups revolving around UFOs, pyramid healing, astrology, psychokinesis, etc. also claim scientific evidence. Again, they may dislike the term “religion,” because it sets them on an equal foot with traditional religions which admit their faith-based existence.

The Church of Satan has similarly claimed validity in science, and in *The Cloven Hoof* Blanche Barton not only claims connection with science but *equates* followers of the religion with scientists:

... Scientists need that ineffable combination of rigid objectivism and precision in their observations, unsullied by expectations or projected hopes, and a dreamer’s mind, capable of imagining methods and drawing conclusions that no one has devised before. They must be able to spend endless hours of boring observations, and then combine those data in new, revelatory combinations, and maintain their momentum and passion throughout those long, boring hours. Only the Satanic mind can come up with that rare combination.

... We should stand as the ones who are the most *intolerant* of sloppy science and imprecise thinking, arrogant in our demands for precision...[‡] [36, p. 26]

6. The religious group promotes itself using modern marketing efforts. [33, p. 33]

Many religious organizations, and especially relatively new organizations, promote themselves by referring to celebrities that have joined. For example, the Church of Scientology uses celebrities such as John Travolta, Kelly Preston, Kirstie Alley, Isaac Hayes, Lisa Marie Presley, Juliette Lewis, Chick Corea, and many others to highlight its success [37].

Again, the Church of Satan fits the model, referring to celebrities (albeit of much lesser fame) such as the individuals named in Section 4, *Members, Priesthood, and Magistrate*.

The above traits of new religions fit the core and the soldiers in the higher two layers of the Church of Satan’s organizational structure in Figure 2. The individuals found in the lower two layers are somewhat different.

[†] Among other differences, a religion divides the world into the mundane and the sacred, which a philosophy does not. Recent philosophies distance themselves from the metaphysical world often found in religions. In addition, religions make use of rituals, ceremonies, and/or prayers that are absent from philosophies. Religions also imply social bindings that philosophies do not offer. Religion also sets certain standards of conduct that philosophies do not require. The line between religion and philosophy may be somewhat blurry at times, but it is ultimately the behavior of followers that determine whether they are religious or not, and consequently whether it is a religion or a philosophy.

[‡] Apparently this demand for precision does not seem to apply to *The Satanic Bible*, and the intolerance of sloppy science does not explain why the Church of Satan insists on outdated and rejected scientific theories, such as those of Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud. If Satanists are inherently scientists, it is bizarre that not a single scientist ranks among the individuals usually featured in the Church of Satan’s self-promotion. At best, the Church of Satan has developed an intellectual beer gut caused by lack of mental training, leaning back comfortably in a chair upholstered with ignorance.

2.2 New Age Style

From a sociological perspective the less active followers of the Church of Satan—the interested followers and the periphery—can best be classified as New Age religious people and people with no actual involvement in the religion, respectively.

New Age religious people are characterized by rather unorganized religious “training” [25, pp. 316-317]. Like the religious people mentioned earlier they typically consider themselves followers of science-founded philosophies, but their relation to the founder and spin-off organizations is usually much more relaxed.

The technical term for their form of religious study is “audience cult”[†] [31, p. 207], which means that their understanding of their religion is self-taught via books and perhaps occasional meetings. They are free to pick and choose from various books and sources: a religious buffet.

Ideologies vary greatly among New Age religions, but a universal characteristic is that of personal development [31, p. 206; 33, p. 24-27]. Most of these religions emphasize individualism and self-realization where the follower works on himself or herself in some manner towards some concept of perfection. Mankind is perceived as a creature with a higher potential, which unfortunately is curbed by today’s cultures and traditions. The followers believe that they will be better off if the religion is allowed a place in the sun, where the follower:

... may come forth in splendor proclaiming “I AM A SATANIST! BOW DOWN, FOR I AM THE HIGHEST EMBODIMENT OF HUMAN LIFE!” [6, p. 45]

—Less restrained, perhaps, but otherwise the Church of Satan’s anticipation of human potential is not different from those of other New Age religions in the world-affirming category.

The Church of Satan’s use of rituals is typical for New Age religions. The designers of the rituals used in New Age religions describe each ritual in relative detail, but make no attempts at explaining how or why the rituals work [25, pp. 320-321]. Followers accept the designers as authorities solely based on the designers’ personal testimonials. If a designer says that a ritual works, the follower accepts it as fact and does not seek scientific or even theological explanations. For example, if a crystal healer states that speaking a particular sentence to a pink stone

will improve the follower’s aura, the follower will unquestioningly do it, evidence and explanations be damned.

Anton LaVey thus provides recipes for rituals in both *The Satanic Bible* and *The Satanic Rituals*, but does not humor the reader with explanations beyond nebulous hints at bioelectricity, directed emotional force, adrenaline, cosmic push/pull effects, tumblers in a combination lock, etc. [6, pp. 135, 143; 15, pp. 17, 107; 14, p. 35]. He does provide an explanation for not explaining, however:

It will be said, by some, that these instructions and procedures are nothing more than applied psychology, or scientific fact, called by “magical” terminology—until they arrive at a passage in the text that is “based on no known scientific finding.” It is for this reason that no attempt has been made to limit the explanations set forth to a set nomenclature. [6, p. 110]

One one account does the Church of Satan’s interested followers distinguish themselves from New Age religions. New Age religions are characterized by their large share of “seeking” people, who drift from one religion to another as they refine their views or gain new insights. The interested followers of the Church of Satan may also drift, but with a peculiar twist: Satan usually remains a common denominator in their religious affiliations when they move from what is essentially one religious group to another, unless they become “born again” Christians or otherwise leave the New Age milieu entirely. The ambiguity of the Church of Satan’s views allows its followers to even radically adjust their views and still pay homage to the Devil. Instead of moving to another religion, they redefine their own religion to designate their new stance. It is a religious analogy to the warring states in Chinese history: each state might win against the Chinese empire, yet somehow it remained China.

Followers may shift stance many times and still refer to themselves as Satanists, and a conflict does not ensue until they are confronted with discrepant views held by other people also believing to be Satanists. It was not until the Internet became available for everyone that such discrepancies became widely evident.

Where some New Age religions keep their followers in the organization via degree systems allowing followers into higher organizational

[†] “Cult” is used here to refer to religious groups of people that are not part of traditional religions, and who often find themselves in conflict with social norms. It is not used in any negative sense.



Figure 4. The Church of Satan claims that it does not advocate membership, but the text “Join now!” on this recruitment poster by Coop is a clear-cut invitation to join. Explanations such as the Church of Satan not being responsible for individual followers’ actions does not hold in cases like this poster where the Church of Satan openly and actively endorses the

poster in, e.g., *The Cloven Hoof*, the Church of Satan’s official newsletter.

levels with new secrets as their insights increase, or simply let the followers go, the Church of Satan thus takes a different route: if a follower revises his or her view, then the new view is Satanism, too. It is only when the follower does not accept other views as Satanic that the Church of Satan administration typically responds with an explanation that the follower’s “one true way” attitude is not appreciated. Such *enforced* dogmalessness ensures that dabblers will not defect to another religion.

The periphery does not travel that far in their quests for insight. These individuals read *The Satanic Bible* or wear a Baphomet symbol and consider themselves Satanists, but have only very limited insight and interest in their religion and can better be described as “identity Satanists” than philosophical, ideological, or religious Satanists. They are somewhat comparable to people wearing “hip hop” pants to display a sense of belonging.

3. Active Recruiting

The Church of Satan states that it does not solicit memberships [1], but material such as Coop’s Church of Satan recruitment poster (Figure 4) is a clear invitation to join. When presented with such initiatives by Church of Satan followers, the Church of Satan typically replies that it is not responsible for the actions of individual followers. Nevertheless, Coop’s poster has been described by Blanche Barton in the Church of Satan’s official newsletter, *The Cloven Hoof* as “the new Church of Satan recruiting poster,” [36] evidence that the Church of Satan endorses the follower’s artwork as a recruitment initiative.

The welcome (“splash”) screen (Figure 5) on the official Church of Satan Web page greets the visitor with the text:

We’re looking for a few outstanding individuals... [38] which is again an invitation to join the organization.

Followers are sometimes inspired to join in the form of seemingly personal “form letters” [23]. A typical form letter is sent to the owner of a newly discovered Web page that deals favorably with Satanism. The form letter contains praise for a well-designed and informative Web page, followed by a question whether the person is a follower of the Church of Satan or intends to join it later, requesting a reason if not. Such letters are of course specifically designed to draw the person’s attention towards the Church of Satan with an eye towards affiliation. Other people receiving such form letters include those that post Church of Satan friendly messages to alt.satanism or various message boards on the Internet.

The *Grotto Master’s Handbook* explains that Grotto Masters receive a discount on grotto fees if they recruit new followers for the organization:

... you’ll receive \$10 credit toward your yearly grotto fees for every direct Sponsorship of a new Church of Satan member. [39]

This is an obvious incitement to recruit followers for the Church of Satan. The *Grotto Master’s Handbook* is marked confidential by the Church of Satan.

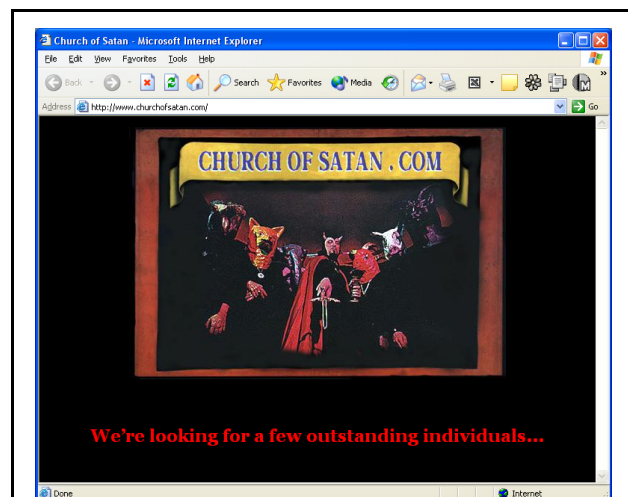


Figure 5. The text: “We’re looking for a few outstanding individuals...” welcoming visitors to the official Church of Satan Web page somewhat contradicts the organization’s claim that it does not advocate membership.

4. Members, Priesthood, and Magistrate

The official Church of Satan Web page maintains that:

individuals who resonate with Satan have always been an alien elite. [34]

This statement does not imply that one must be a member of the Church of Satan to qualify as elite, but it does imply that followers of the Church of Satan automatically belong to an elite, since presumably they must have felt a resonance with Satan in order to join. Hence, the statement suggests that joining the organization is equivalent to being part of an elite.

If the above only hints at being a member of an elite by implication of a membership of the Church of Satan, any doubt is cast aside when the new follower receives the confirmation of membership from the Church of Satan, which declares that:

You have successfully entered into an alliance with true Satanists, those who lead and innovate ... —you have established an unwavering bond with the rare others like yourself. Here you have found freedom. [40]

It also promises if not wealth and riches, at least a potential for it:

As a Satanic magician, you will develop your abilities to change things around you, to influence those you wish, and to draw forth the advantages you desire. [40]

The individuals forming the elite are described just as ambiguously as the Church of Satan's ideology, and are vaguely referred to as those who "lead and innovate." The Church of Satan Web page refers to itself and its followers as:

a cabal of like-minded, highly independent individuals who don't require a social support group. Such selective folk, the aristocracy of the able, at times partake of the pleasure of finding those few who share their personal interests. [26]

Neither specifically state how the "alien elite" is an elite, but only describes them as somehow in charge and in positions as independent de facto leaders.

When the Church of Satan gives examples of members of the elite, recurring names include: Sammy Davis, Jr., Jayne Mansfield, Kenneth Anger, Marilyn Manson, Coop, Timothy Patrick Butler, Michael Moynihan, Vincent Crowley, and Boyd Rice. Occasionally the list is extended with a few other people. Few people outside of the Satanic scene know any but the first four people mentioned, and at least two of those four people received their membership in the

Church of Satan only as honorary memberships. The remaining list of people have had moderate success in their specific fields, but would hardly qualify as an elite.

By joining the Church of Satan one somehow becomes part of the cabal formed by the elite, opaque as the definition may be. But if anyone becomes part of it simply by joining the Church of Satan, statistically the elite is really comprised of people not particularly different from the new follower. If such logic escapes the new follower, the follower is free to invent any idealized form of elitism and believe that he or she is now part of this made-up elite.

"Registered" membership of the Church of Satan is obtained by sending a sum of \$100.00 and a signed statement that one wishes to join the organization to the Church of Satan [1]. It is registered members that receive the confirmation of membership referenced above.

"Active" membership requires followers to send detailed personal information to the Church of Satan, providing contact information and a photograph, and the answers to a questionnaire with forty personal questions [1]. This form of membership is otherwise free.

The Church of Satan does not explain why it requires such detailed personal information in the active membership application, but it is presumably used when followers request contact with consenting followers in their area. The detailed information can be used to guarantee that people with diverging interpretations of the Church of Satan's writings are kept apart. It is usually more productive to gather like-minded individuals than disagreeing individuals, but the separation also minimizes the risk of revealing the ambiguity of the writings. The Church of Satan states that, among other reasons, the information is used to protect its members:

The protection of our members is one of the reasons we gather information through our extensive questionnaire about the people who affiliate and wish Active Membership participation. [1]

The Church of Satan has stated that its followers are acknowledged with titles based on accomplishments in the "real world":

Members of our Priesthood are people of accomplishment in the real world—they have mastered skills and have won peer recognition, which is how they have attained their position—"as above, so below." [1]

Some speculation on the nature of these accomplishments has been made, as the accomplishments of some nominees have seemed rather

limited. A common trait across all nominations to priesthood or magistrate is that the nominees have influenced other people to join the Church of Satan, that is, their accomplishment is that of contributing to an increased membership count.

(Incidentally, the Church of Satan's self-image as an organization for people capable of real-world accomplishments is far from unique to the Church of Satan—it is common for New Age religions to cater to those very people that are socially well-integrated. [31, p. 50])

A distinct group of people have received priesthood or magistrate degrees as honorary titles. Most known among these are perhaps Sammy Davis, Jr., King Diamond, and Marilyn Manson. The exact reason for their honorary titles is somewhat unclear. Sammy Davis, Jr. was Jewish; King Diamond's personal belief that centers around an afterlife and the existence of a human soul seems at odds with the Church of Satan's fundamental stance even when the ambiguity of its ideology is considered; and Marilyn Manson's "outcast" style conflicts with the Church of Satan's "elite" image—and besides, he later publicly distanced himself from the Church of Satan. These individuals have certainly made accomplishments in the real world by figuratively raising the Devil in their stage shows, and the reason for their honorary titles may be that simple. However, the titles may also have been offered as a marketing scheme. By offering a honorary title to a successful person the Church of Satan acquires a marketing agent whose success becomes linked with Satan and the Church of Satan via the title in the organization.

In 1975 Anton LaVey decided to sell titles for a fee, a decision that led Michael Aquino to conclude that the Church of Satan had deviated from its path. Michael Aquino subsequently formed The Temple of Set to continue what he believed was the original intent of the Church of Satan [2, pp. 407 – 412]. The reasoning behind the selling of titles may have been that the ability to afford money on mostly useless titles was an indication of success in the real world, reflecting the Church of Satan's current stance on accomplishments as a metric of titular awards. Diane Hegarty's letter to Michael Aquino indicates that this is the case:

If a big shot is really a big shot and/or capable of offering the Church a sizable contribution, he has had his

fill of fancy dinners, honor guards, and fifteen-word honorary titles. [2, p. 827]

Intentional or not, the selling of intangibles is also a classical example of fleecing people that will pay for a pat on their backs. It is not clear whether anyone has taken the offer, unless the title as Grotto Master qualifies. (A Grotto Master is required to pay a yearly fee.)

5. Desire for a Name Patent

The Church of Satan is the first organization in modern society to claim devotion to Satan; Aleister Crowley's groups, its only arguable contesters to the title as Satanic organizations, have been linked with occultism per se rather than Satanism specifically, and the various "religious Satanists" in the 1950s were clandestine and short-lived.

The novelty granted the Church of Satan an implied patent on the name, and the Church of Satan has historically been rash to dismiss any group making claim to the name as a mere copy of the Church of Satan (see, e.g., the Church of Satan's *Satanic Bunco Sheet* [21], which practically defines any Satanic group beyond the Church of Satan as such a copy) that prospective or current followers should avoid.

Although the Church of Satan does state that a person is born a Satanist and that membership of the Church of Satan is not necessary to be a Satanist [41], the Church of Satan does not tend to acknowledge people as Satanists unless they openly support the Church of Satan. In fact, ranking followers in the Church of Satan have habitually declared that only through membership of the Church of Satan does a person qualify as a "real" Satanist—in the words of a Church of Satan priest:

And then there are two types of Satanists; those who are members of the Church Of Satan and those who wish they were. [42]

Complaints to their superior in rank are normally defused with the explanation that the ranking follower is entitled to his or her opinion, and that one should not otherwise take this follower too seriously. In the case of the aforementioned priest, Peter Gilmore explained to one member:

He has his own personal style [...]. That has no bearing on you both at all, I simply am aware that this situation exists. [43]

It is not clear how many people have been intimidated by these declarations and felt required to join as a result, but the author has en-



Figure 6. The Baphomet symbol was copied by the Church of Satan from the front cover of Maurice Bessy's book, *Magic and the Supernatural* (left). The current edition of *The Satanic Bible* uses the same symbol (right), but with several clean-ups compensating for the somewhat blurred rendition on Bessy's book. Although the precise rendition is less important than symbolism when it comes to religious symbols, the Church of Satan has aggressively pursued other uses of the symbol as copyright violations against the Church of Satan.

countered people that have been insecure of their entitlement to the label "Satanist" as non-members of the Church of Satan because of such statements [23].

The Church of Satan aggressively defends its desired position as sole proprietor of Satanism on the Internet. Many organizations and individuals have received intimidating emails with (hollow) lawsuit threats or have been subjected to harassment by Church of Satan followers per instruction from the Church of Satan's administration. For example, Peter Gilmore wrote in an email to selected individuals that the administration would:

... like to see you perhaps interact with one another and *coordinate your attacks on those who dare to try to besmirch our organization* [author's emphasis], and those of us who I think have earned your respect as your leaders. [44]

There are also examples that the Church of Satan's administration has divulged personal membership information about followers who turned on the Church of Satan [44], despite the organization's claim in the affiliation information that:

an individual's membership is held in strictest confidence by the Church of Satan. [1]

Other attempts to keep a monopoly on Satanism include the Church of Satan's use of the Baphomet symbol (Figure 6). Reportedly, the Church of Satan originally used an exact copy of the Baphomet symbol displayed on the front cover of *Magic and the Supernatural* [45] on membership cards and other material, but has later produced a cleaned-up rendition [46]. The Church of Satan does not own the original symbol, but the Church of Satan has attempted to prevent other organizations from using any rendition of the symbol claiming it to be a copyright violation against the Church of Satan [23].[†] Because the precise rendition is less important than symbolism when it comes to religious symbols, the Church of Satan's aggressive trademark protection indicates that there is something else at stake than the use of the religious symbol.

The Church of Satan often argues that if not for Anton LaVey, other organizations would never have thought of referring to themselves as Satanic. This argument is questionable, however, because it is based on the improbable premise that no-one else would have designed an organization and called it "Satanism" dur-

[†] In practice, it is the specific use of the Baphomet symbol in combination with the words "Church of Satan" that is protected by a trademark, not the symbol itself. Keeping tradition, the Church of Satan administration seldom pursues copyright "violators" directly, but instead encourages followers of the Church of Satan to combat people that are followers of other Satanic organizations, and hence also those that use the symbol outside of the Church of Satan. This enables the administration to deny direct involvement using the plea of not being responsible for the actions of its followers.

ing the three decades following the creation of Anton LaVey's organization, especially because the interest in occultism and rebellion against authorities is still strong.

The question remains what the Church of Satan is competing for, and why other organizations are seen as threats. The membership count cannot be important, because the membership count is kept secret, and the organization is hardly collecting souls. The best bets seem to be either the desire to be a large organization, hoping to eventually gain influence, or money. At a \$100.00 registration fee per follower, followers are a profitable business, although far less profitable than systemized exploitation of members by means of tutelary charge, for example.

Whatever its motives, the Church of Satan fiercely combats any alternatives to its desired monopoly.

6. Earned Hostility

Most organizations laying claim to Satan's name are hostile against the Church of Satan. According to the *Satanic Bunco Sheet* the Church of Satan views the attacks mostly as "sour-grapes" attacks, meaning that the organizations are envious of something that only the Church of Satan provides [21]. There is probably an element of truth in the statement, because a larger portion of the groups tend to select names that are very close to the name "The Church of Satan," indicating their primary source of inspiration. We thus find groups emerging named "The First Church of Satan," "New Church of Satan," "The Church of Satanic Brotherhood," "The Original Church of Satan," etc. Lending further credibility to the Church of Satan's view the behavior of many new High Priests of various new and improved Church of Satans (not necessarily including or limited to the organizations mentioned above) seem rather focused on being High Priests and little else. Finally, it is common to observe rebellious behavior against the original organization among break-out sects.

It is easy to become a member of the Church of Satan and with the grapes thus within easy reach the Church of Satan's sour-grapes argument is not air-tight, however. Furthermore, varying versions of the sour-grapes argument tend to be uncritically used against any hostile non-follower, ex-follower, or organization, indicating that perhaps this argument provides an

explanation that is too simple. There may be other motivations behind some of the attacks against the Church of Satan.

Some doubt can be shed over the desire to be a copy of the Church of Satan. Inspiration from *The Satanic Bible* or several of the many sources that Anton LaVey cited is unescapable seeing that most other sources are Christian theology. Drawing inspiration from Anton LaVey is not equivalent to copying the Church of Satan.

Split groups are inevitable, because traditionally such groups arise from different interpretations of a religion, or because emphasis is placed on other elements of the religion than in the original organization. The vagueness of the Church of Satan begs for diversion and individuals focusing on each their understanding. In any religion, individuals that delve deeper into a case that they feel dedicated to usually desire less breadth in the organization's conviction than necessary for the sustainment of the original community. They split off, not because they want to be a copy the original group, but because they want to pursue their own, refined beliefs.

The choice of a similar name is therefore not necessarily proof that the new organizations desire to *copy* the Church of Satan or otherwise ride on its coat-tails, as the Church of Satan argues. Instead, the name testifies that the organizations wish to be what they thought the Church of Satan should have been or once was.

The Church of Satan may misunderstand it as an attack when another organization clarifies its stance on some of the facets also found in the Church of Satan. It is also possible that Church of Satan followers feel that their religion is the "one true way" and that any other voiced opinion is a heretical attack. Perusing archived Usenet (newsgroup) messages on the Internet the Church of Satan is quick to scornfully demerit any competition it receives, and typically with no other provocation than the announcement of a new organization that does not mention the Church of Satan.

When attacked by other organizations the Church of Satan may have had motives to have cast the first stone triggering an aggressive reaction from the other organization. *Pentagonal Revisionism* states that first of all the Church of Satan desires *stratification*, meaning that:

Water must be allowed to seek its own level without interference from apologists for incompetence. [14]

It is a form of laissez-faire libertarianism, which on one hand implies that the Church of Satan should welcome competing organizations as vehicles for stratification, and on the other hand should view them as threats. The Church of Satan evidently concentrates on the latter, attempting to *level* other organizations when natural stratification in the Church of Satan's favor is not prompt enough.

Some of the other organizations are hardly innocent, but the Church of Satan evidently attempts to quell its competition by means of intimidation as discussed earlier. Decrees issued by the organization's very top, such as *Sycophants Unite!* by Blanche Barton, demand that:

[The Church of Satan's] supporters and advocates must be prepared to recognize and battle our enemies, especially when they're wearing black robes. [47]

The enemies are defined as any other organization laying claim to Satan's name.

The Church of Satan presumably has a large membership base compared with competing organizations who are encouraged by the Church of Satan to attack first. Even without encouragement, for each person that attacks the Church of Satan for no reason statistically the Church of Satan can be expected to have many more followers that have made similar attacks out of the blue. The encouragement only exacerbates the hostility.

It is very plausible that many attacks against the Church of Satan are results of harassment by Church of Satan followers acting on expectations from the Church of Satan's administrators. *The CoS Files* contain examples of conflicts that are initiated by the Church of Satan. [44]

The competition from alternative Satanic organizations is two-fold: firstly, the alternative organizations threaten the Church of Satan's recruitment as they provide additional options for those that would otherwise have joined the Church of Satan. If one was to believe the Church of Satan's statement that it does not advocate membership, it would seem unlikely that the Church of Satan would be provoked by a competition for followers. In fact, the Church of Satan often proclaims that it is better off without those followers that join other Satanic organizations [48; 23]. As was argued in the previous section, however, the Church of Satan actively recruits followers, and the proclamation instead indicates that the Church of Satan itself

is prone to sour-grape attacks over much smaller grapes.

Secondly, the alternative organizations threaten the Church of Satan's monopoly on Satanism. But, this is inevitable, because as argued earlier virtually any view can be derived from the Church of Satan's material, and as long as it is referred to as "Satanic," it qualifies per the Church of Satan's definition.

Both the Church of Satan and other organizations using the label "Satanism" have interest at stake, and to believe the Church of Satan's pretence as a completely innocent organization enduring unjust attacks from vile renegades would be preposterous. On the contrary, the Church of Satan encourages its followers to preemptively attack other organizations.

7. Double-Talking and Two-Facing

When inevitably followers or prospective followers of the Church of Satan have complained about the opinions of charismatic people in the Church of Satan, the Church of Satan has usually used the eclecticism argument, replying that the religion encompasses a large array of differing opinions which together form a greater whole, and that each follower should choose what makes him or her successful [23].

At the same time, followers and prospective followers that agree with the same charismatic people find that the Church of Satan reinforces their support stating that these people form the core of the Church of Satan's ideology.

It is unlikely that people with widely diverging opinions will want to discuss religious details with each other on a constructive level (they will rather just hiss at each other), and therefore unlikely that they will discover the conflicting support given by the Church of Satan's officials. If they do discover the conflict nonetheless, it can be resolved with a repetition of the above reference to richness and diversity of the religion. (That is, serving the Church of Satan's purpose to "confound and confuse till the stars be numbered," the people are being told that they are both right, and that they only do not have the insight to appreciate this fact yet.)

This stratagem enables the Church of Satan to let many different people with opposing views interact with people of their own liking. In turn, these people are given the impression that Satanism is exactly about their particular interpre-

tation, because their “contact” in the Church of Satan is endorsed by the organization. By claiming support, not only does the Church of Satan persuade gullible people to join the organization believing it to be well suited to their personal ideology; it also places the charismatic people in a role as active recruiters.

It is quite possible that from the Church of Satan’s view their role as recruiters may be their only justification and reason for titular reward in the organization, and that their ideological contributions are summarily ignored unless they are useful for luring more followers and their accompanying \$100.00 into the organization. If the esteemed recruiters eventually begin to discourage more people from joining than they encourage to join, their titles may be revoked or the recruiters may be expelled for dubious reasons of sudden disagreement with the Church of Satan or its founder.

8. The 1975 “Turning Point”

It is possible that the Church of Satan started as a genuine organization dedicated to the Prince of Darkness, but then deviated from its course and focused on perpetuating its professed alliance with the Devil only as a conduit for fraud. This is the view held by Michael Aquino of the Temple of Set.

The fact that the Church of Satan was originally a home study group indicates that at the very least it was originally an ideological movement. Michael Aquino describes how the Church of Satan ostensibly later turned its back on Satan, 1975 being the year where the Church of Satan decided to sell priesthood titles at a fee followed by increasing charges for services and Baphomet medallions; Baphomet medallions previously sold at \$20 already with a comparatively high profit of \$17 were now sold at \$50 a piece [2, p. 420].

According to Michael Aquino, the Church of Satan practically ceased to exist as a religious organization by 1975, largely withdrawing from the public scene until the late 1980s when Peter Gilmore entered the scene after double-courting the Temple of Set and the Church of Satan. (This double-courting illustrates that Peter Gilmore used two-faced policies from the very beginning of his career in Satanism.) Michael Aquino argues that Anton LaVey had lost interest in Satanism and instead attempted to turn the organization into his personal cash cow, and

that the organization’s continued activities were a financial scam.

Michael Aquino shows evidence that a focus on finances did escalate in the months before 1975, and that 1975 may have presented a somewhat drastic escalation. It is also believable that Michael Aquino’s relation of his concord with Anton LaVey on the belief in Satan is correct, judging from Michael Aquino’s otherwise exquisite memory and careful use of sources and documentation. The odds of Michael Aquino having a personal agenda that provokes the view mentioned above are low given the additional documentation of Anton LaVey’s accept of, or belief in, the Devil cited earlier.

In frustration over the new direction, which Michael Aquino saw as ideological treason, he claims to have performed a personal invocation of Satan in the form of the ancient Egyptian god Set. In *The Book of Coming Forth by Night*, Michael Aquino describes how Set explained that Anton LaVey’s “infernal mandate” had been revoked and passed to Michael Aquino as Anton LaVey’s successor:

I [Set] raised him [Anton LaVey] to the Will of a Daimon, unbounded by the material dimensions. And so I thought to honour him beyond other men. But it may have been this act of mine that ordained his fall.

... Michael Aquino, you are become Magus V° of the Aeon of Set. [49]

The Church of Satan has a case against Michael Aquino in terms of the postulated 1975 schism. Firstly, the Church of Satan advises that Michael Aquino’s revelation might have been prompted by a strong desire to be a new Anton LaVey or to take over the Church of Satan:

This supernatural revelation supposedly gives him the right to supercede the Church of Satan. Doesn’t that sound familiar? [50]

Thus noting that the revelation came at an opportune moment when Michael Aquino found himself torn between loyalty with the Church of Satan and his personal interpretation of its ideology, the Church of Satan has a point: Michael Aquino’s revelation and his evaluation of the Church of Satan are to be taken with a grain of salt.

Secondly, Michael Aquino’s conclusion as regards the Church of Satan’s departure from its ideology by turning its back on the literal Satan has a potential flaw. His statement that the Church of Satan included the belief in a literal Devil is probably correct considering Anton LaVey’s acceptance of a literal belief in Satan. It

is more doubtful whether this belief extended throughout the entire Church of Satan as Michael Aquino feels, however

The Church of Satan argues that Michael Aquino overestimates his own importance in the Church of Satan, because in his book, *The Church of Satan*, Michael Aquino gives an impression that he played a much more important role in the Church of Satan than is reflected in Burton Wolfe's hagiography of Anton LaVey, *The Devil's Avenger*, [51] which was released prior to Michael Aquino's conflict with, and subsequent departure from, the Church of Satan in 1975. The book does not mention Michael Aquino, but other followers trusted by Anton LaVey are named. The Church of Satan sensibly argues that if Michael Aquino had been as important for the Church of Satan as indicated in his own book, he would have deserved at least a mention in Burton Wolfe's book.

Michael Aquino may have represented just one of perhaps several groups that were each given the impression of being important and privy to confided material. It is reasonable to assume in that case that Michael Aquino was deliberately mislead to believe that he was a most important figure in the Church of Satan and that his views formed the foundation of the organization, while other groups were told similar stories about *their* views.

Michael Aquino's conclusion is thus valid, but accounting for his possibly limited influence the conclusion may apply to just the group that Michael Aquino knew of and possibly some others. Michael Aquino's conclusion and its constrained application together indicate that if there were a 1975 schism, it applied to just some of the Church of Satan's followers. Specifically, Michael Aquino's conclusion would have been the same if:

1. The Church of Satan believed in Satan, but in 1975 it changed its course and became a scam.
2. The Church of Satan had deliberately echoed what each group wanted to hear, and Michael Aquino was led to believe that his view was shared with the entire Church of Satan. Signs that had become too clear to ignore caused the scales to fall from his eyes in mid-1975.

The latter seems more likely given that conflicting interpretations and lies such as Anton LaVey's and the Church of Satan's fabricated

past were produced prior to 1975 (see Section 9, *Unsupported Claims*). Hence, instead of necessarily evidencing a change of course by the Church of Satan, Michael Aquino's book may rather be a report on how one group became disillusioned upon realizing that the Church of Satan had other goals than the group had been led to believe.

The first of the Church of Satan's objections against Michael Aquino remains valid, because he received his revelation at a suspiciously opportune moment.

Its other objection is invalid, however, because Michael Aquino did have distinctive importance in the Church of Satan. He was the editor of the Church of Satan's official newsletter, *The Cloven Hoof* and held a IV° title (the highest title obtainable) in the Church of Satan [50], and had authored some of the Church of Satan's rituals, two of which are available in *The Satanic Rituals*. His having held such positions open speculations as to why Michael Aquino was not *at all* mentioned in Burton Wolfe's book.

The explanation turns out to be simple enough: Burton Wolfe's book covers the first few years of the Church of Satan, ending with 1970, just half a year after Michael Aquino had joined. Hence, the Church of Satan's argument that the omission of Michael Aquino from the book owed to his lacking importance at the time when Michael Aquino departed from the Church of Satan is unfounded.

It is reasonable to assume that Anton LaVey's original home study group was honestly dedicated to an emerging religion whose backing ideology the group did not perceive as ambiguous for the simple reason that they had an unspoken agreement on the understanding of Satanism. Later, but possibly as early as the foundation of the Church of Satan as more than just a home study group, profit became a stronger motivator than occult studies and insight, or the interest faded.

In conclusion, it seems that 1975 may have marked a time when Michael Aquino discovered a scam, but if the scam was not intentional from the very birth of the Church of Satan, it certainly must have been brewing before 1975.

9. Unsupported Claims

Biographies of Anton LaVey make fantastic claims about his past, claiming that Anton LaVey had been employed as a lion tamer in

Clyde Batty's circus, played in the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, that he played the Devil in Roman Polanski's film *Rosemary's Baby*, that his grandmother was a gypsy who passed on to him legends of vampires and werewolves in her native Transylvania, etc. [3; 51].

In 1998 Zeena Schreck (Anton LaVey's second daughter) and Nikolas Schreck compiled *Anton LaVey: Legend and Reality* [52], a list of refutations of many of the fantastic claims that Anton LaVey and the Church of Satan had made about him and his life. The document includes a number of remarks that may be debatable. For example, it relies in part on statements by Diane Hegarty, Anton LaVey's second wife, including testimonials that she had made during their divorce case. It is common for divorcing couples to accuse each other of mistreatment, and indeed such allegations arose during the divorce between Anton LaVey and Diane Hegarty, too. Her accusations of violence against her committed by Anton LaVey are a clear sign that the divorce was problematic but they are not necessarily true.

Most of the remaining statements in Zeena and Nikolas Schreck's compilation, however, are highly plausible and do not rely on statements by opinionated sources. For example, Anton LaVey asserted that he joined the Clyde Beatty circus in 1947 as a lion tamer [3]. If common sense alone does not speak against the employment of a 17 year old new hire as a lion tamer, the absence of the name "LaVey" or "Levey" from Clyde Beatty's employment records strongly indicates that Anton LaVey fabricated the story. Similarly, with few exceptions that provide no statistical weight, Anton LaVey has taken credit for curses involving the death or harm of his enemies only after the alleged maledictions had taken effect. Like his professed circus employment and curses, most of his history is either unsupported, posthumously claimed, or contradicted by facts.

It is clear that Zeena and Nikolas Schreck's motivation for making public the myths behind Anton LaVey in itself does not provide a case against the accuracy of the information. The

lack of adequate refutation of the document by the Church of Satan or anyone else is telling.

Considering the amount of attention that the Church of Satan has given the few verifiably true events in Anton LaVey's, combined with the apparent need to fabricate stories it is remarkable how comparatively few noteworthy events must have taken place in his life and in the history of the Church of Satan.[†] One would expect any other memorable events to have received similar attention.

Not surprisingly did the Church of Satan not approve of *Anton LaVey: Legend and Reality*. Faced with undeniable evidence against Anton LaVey's claims, the Church of Satan instead defended its founder with the argument that the details of his life are less important than the fact that he founded the Church of Satan. Apparently the Church of Satan does not consider this argument when it attacks leaders of other Satanic organizations, because the Church of Satan is quick to track down and point out inconsistencies and potential fallacies in claims made by competing leaders [53, 54].

Unless the Church of Satan is a personality cult or otherwise revolves around the life of its founder, the Church of Satan's appeal to irrelevance is correct. The Church of Satan even turns the argument around, claiming that it is those who mention that Anton LaVey fabricated his past that have personality cult mentality—in the words of Michael Rose (Magister):

Another common avenue of attack is to charge that members of the Church of Satan worshipped Dr. LaVey. These dolts cannot distinguish worship from respect. ... They imagine that by criticizing Dr. LaVey they can diminish, or cause us to reject, the Church of Satan. They do not attack the philosophy; they attack the philosopher. This makes it quite clear that it is they who are the personality cultists. [55]

While it is true that an attack on the founder does not necessarily imply an attack on the ideology, it is false to state that the attack implies personality cult mentality on behalf of the attacker. The argument may apply to some people, but does not address the following cases, for example:

[†] If anything, Anton LaVey seems to have been rather unsuccessful. He apparently never held a long term employment, and living off his only success (the creation of the Church of Satan) did not help him from dying broke in a cold and run-down house. He must have been bitterly aware of this fact unless his sense of reality was severely distorted. In *The Satanic Bible* Anton LaVey states that man: "*is worshipping by proxy the man that invented god* [original emphasis]" [6, p. 44]. If LaVey knew that he was a failure, one may speculate whether his motive behind the Church of Satan was a desire to be worshipped by proxy for a god that he invented. As explained in Section 2, *A New Religion*, in that respect he succeeded.

- The leader's false past and less than glorious demise is criticized with no ulterior motives, with motives of devotion to facts, etc.
- The leader is criticized because it will affect those Church of Satan followers whose primary devotion is Anton LaVey. It is understandable why Church of Satan followers are perceived as people with personality cult mentality when, for example, Peter Gilmore solemnly states that:

Dr. LaVey is our High Priest, because he is certainly the most advanced person in the Church of Satan. He is truly a brilliant man and one that we can all learn from. Actually, he never ceases to amaze me with, er, the wondrous things that he's experienced and has to teach. [56]

- When a Church of Satan follower reveres Anton LaVey as the foremost Satanist and at the same time considers his ideology to be a recipe for success, pointing out that Anton LaVey died bitter and broke in a run-down house serves to illustrate that the follower is wrong on at least one account.

Hence, it is less than clear, and maybe even unlikely, that those who criticize Anton LaVey would be "personality cultists." It is a twist of irony that cult mentality is defined as the profession of great devotion to some person and the desire to follow that person almost without questions, when Michael Rose continues:

I've never believed any of the tired accusations that these people have made ...

Dr. LaVey blazed a trail. We who followed him because we were traveling the same way will continue undeterred. [55]

It remains that if Anton LaVey's life were as irrelevant as Church of Satan officials claim, it is remarkable that he would fabricate such fantastic stories, even if he did so out of personal vanity, or perhaps because had convinced his original home study group of an unusual past and was forced to keep up the appearance. Evidently the Church of Satan wants to draw from the mystery of a very special person, or the Church of Satan would have ceased to emphasize his "remarkable" life. It is noteworthy that the Church of Satan membership card shown in Figure 1 displays the text "Anton Szandor LaVey / Founder and High Priest," because it is very unusual for a membership card to display another person's name *unless* it is a fan club membership card. Although the Church of Satan's appeal to irrelevance is valid, clearly it

does not reflect the Church of Satan's use of Anton LaVey's sinister image.

Lies provide a clue to one's values, because a storyteller lies about that which he finds important, and the particular claims themselves are thus telltale of the Church of Satan's values. It is therefore not surprising, based on the stories about Anton LaVey's life, that the Church of Satan invariably appreciates people involved in showbiz or "shock" art, sexual fetichism, and various forms of con artistry. (The "News" section on the official Church of Satan Web page [38] has strong emphasis on such engagements, for example.) One never hears about a Church of Satan follower accentuated by the Church of Satan as a lawyer, programmer, professor, etc.

10. The Barnum Effect

The famous circus showman P. T. Barnum's formula for success was: "Always have a little something for everybody." The so-called "Barnum Effect," named after P. T. Barnum and his methods, takes advantage of the fact that when a person is confronted with an analysis or description where many views are presented and both sides of each view are presented, the person perceives an apparent accuracy. It is an illusion based on the fallacy of positive instances, in which a person remembers the instances that confirm his or her expectations and forgets the rest [57].

Like palm readings, fortune tellings, horoscopes, and other products of pseudo-psychology, a religion that is stated in such general terms that it can hardly miss will always contain "a little something for everybody."

Essays by Anton LaVey in, e.g., *The Devil's Notebook* and *Satan Speaks!* and his general admiration of con artists including P. T. Barnum indicate that Anton LaVey was keenly aware of the methods employed by people making a living off the money they could trick from unsuspecting victims. *The Satanic Witch* [58], also by Anton LaVey, and its extensive reference is a veritable cornucopia of useful techniques to beguile unwary people into following one's wishes.

The double-talking and two-facing of the Church of Satan's current administration provides followers and prospective followers with just what they want to hear, hiding the many opposing views, which are told only to *other* people that want to hear *those* views. In the

world of con artists, this is a form of cold reading, except that the Church of Satan raises the temperature to both warm and hot readings, drawing on a priori knowledge about those that it addresses and tailoring the replies accordingly.

Intentional or not, the ambiguous texts of the Church of Satan fit the traditional structure of statements characterized by the Barnum Effect, and the Church of Satan's selective answers are those of the crystal ball gazer.

Anton LaVey's many references to other established religions as hoaxes may have been fully deserved, but they also drew attention from the possibility that his own ideology might be no better, much like a pickpocket may attempt to create a commotion that allows him to work undisturbed. The references appeal to those that know they were fooled by the Christian religion; their emotional reaction against their childhood religion is likely to compel them to believe Anton LaVey when he sells his ideology as the "real thing" that they missed earlier.

11. A Financial Scam?

A scam is loosely defined as promising and charging for delivery without delivering.

Michael Aquino argues that the Church of Satan is a scam, because it deviated from the Devil's path for financial gains while still claiming to pay homage to Satan (see page 19).

There is reason to believe that the Church of Satan knowingly attempts to fleece its members, and that some profit was planned from the very establishment of the Church of Satan. In an interview with Michael Aquino, professional publicist Edward Webber recalls suggesting to Anton LaVey that LaVey:

would never make any money by lecturing on Friday nights for donations [...] it would be better to form some sort of church and get a charter from the State of California [...] I told Anton at the time that the press was going to flip out over all this and that we would get a lot of notoriety. [2, p. 27]

Reviewer Jerry Carroll of *The San Francisco Chronicle* interviewed Anton LaVey over dinner one night in 1986, and reported:

It was all an act for a marketing niche. "It's a living," as he put it. He didn't hide his contempt for his followers [2, p. 431]

Occasionally opponents of the Church of Satan have insinuated that the \$100.00 membership fee is a scam. The Church of Satan has typically replied that Anton LaVey could have cho-

sen a more profitable scheme. This reply does not invalidate the accusation, however, because it only states that Anton LaVey was not focused on *excessive* income or that he made a poor choice.

Another recurring reply to the accusation is that Church of Satan followers knew that the money went to Anton LaVey himself. This argument is valid, but followers pay the \$100.00 in appreciation of Anton LaVey's creation of an organization that allegedly suits their ideology. *But this is the scam:* the organization does not match their personal ideology any more than Leo horoscopes fit Scorpio persons (which they do only because of the Barnum Effect). The Church of Satan's reply is thus identical to stating that the Church of Satan is not a scam simply because the deceived people were convinced!

However, although the replies from the Church of Satan do not reject the accusation, and although the yearly Grotto Master fees and the \$100.00 registration fee that the Church of Satan receives for each membership do provide a continuous flow of money, there is ample room for improving this flow. The Church of Satan fits the pattern of any other religious group, and if money were its primary business the Church of Satan would probably employ several of the common financial engines of other religions.

The limited financial scam-like profiting may therefore be a perk for the religion's leaders, but it is hardly their primary concern.

More seriously, Michael Aquino has noted that Anton LaVey filed for bankruptcy as a result of his and Diane Hegarty's divorce. The bankruptcy was eventually completed after lengthy trials, and included the liquidation of the Church of Satan [2, pp. 427 – 429]. Hence, the Church of Satan cannot demand payment from anyone, because there is no organization to receive the payment. Only its name exists as a group description, somewhat like the term "Christianity" can exist without a living Christ.

Church of Satan officials and members argue that evidently the Church of Satan exists, because the members are right there to argue its existence. This is a valid argument, but it addresses a quite different issue. The argument proves that *followers* exist that embrace the Satanic ideology (ambiguous as it may be), but it provides no proof that the Church of Satan ex-

ists as a legal organization that can demand payments.

It should perhaps be kept in mind that the Church of Satan is far from alone in financial speculations, which appear to be the rule rather than the exception among religious groups.[†] The Church of Satan is perhaps one of the lesser players as far as financial scam is considered. It would therefore be incorrect to conclude that money forms the Church of Satan's motivation for existence, simply because the organization does not pursue financial gains that aggressively. But, it would be equally incorrect to state that the Church of Satan has no interest in scam-like financial activity.

12. An Ideological Scam?

It was argued in Section 2, *A New Religion*, that the Church of Satan provides a religion that is so vaguely defined that virtually any interpretation is readily possible. Such a wide appeal enables the religion to gain a large number of members without explicitly supporting any of them.

Many of the Church of Satan's followers seem to revere Anton LaVey as exceptionally intelligent, and his oratory skills and literacy can hardly be denied. At first glance it may nonetheless seem too flattering to Anton LaVey's intelligence to accredit him with the ability to mastermind a hoax that has gone unnoticed for almost forty years.

Anton LaVey's intelligence was probably well above average, and he was certainly not naïve but possessed a certain cunning and an instinctive ability to be in the right place at the right time. This is a character trait that fits most successful con artists.

Beyond Anton LaVey's skill as a con artist—and certainly his desire to be one—it may have been a question of luck. Just like *The Satanic Bible* was pieced together facing an imminent deadline, the Church of Satan may have been established in a hurry with few thoughts towards a consistent ideology. The original Magic Circle almost certainly shared an implied ideology, some of which was captured in *The Satanic Bible*, some not. Once the Church of Satan had been established followers would ap-

proach it with each their own understanding, often incompatible with those of other followers, of the ideology expressed by the Church of Satan and *The Satanic Bible*.

Given evidence in both directions, it seems fair to conclude that Anton LaVey did not plan the Church of Satan, and much less an ideological scam. Instead, Anton LaVey accidentally became involved in publishing and news events beyond his control, and being a con artist at heart he saw an unused opportunity that he half chose, half was forced to exploit.

13. Inconsistency Gone Unnoticed

It may seem surprising at first that the ambiguity of the Church of Satan's ideology has gone unnoticed for decades. However, it is likely that faced with clear examples of ambiguity, followers will just ignore them. When it comes to religion, rational arguments against the religion tend to fall on the followers' deaf ears if only the followers *feel* that the religion suits their best interests. In such situations it is human to err, and apparently even more human to stay in error.

This section provides a number of possible explanations why followers may ignore rampant examples that they were fooled, and why the inconsistency and perhaps deliberate hoax is not acknowledged.

13.1 Followers of the Church of Satan

As is also discussed in Section 2, *A New Religion*, a follower may not acknowledge the ambiguity and instead consider his or her own interpretation to be the only interpretation possible. The dynamics discussed in Section 2 that cause followers to isolate themselves from other influences also act as a barrier against criticism. (Outside influence is a form of implied criticism, as it provides examples of alternative interpretations.)

A person is less inclined to accepting a statement telling the person that he or she is wrong than a statement that confirms the person's belief [59]. Because religious questions or personal values are typically held without supporting evidence (as opposed to a rational stance), evidence pointing in another direction has an even lesser effect on the person if it is religion or val-

[†] Most religions are speculative in that they make hypotheses that invariably fail the falsification principle. By definition, they are usually scams because they fail to deliver what they promise. They do, however, deliver other products such as social networks, emotional gratification, comfortable illusions, etc., meaning that their followers do get something that they pay for—just not what was promised.

ues that are questioned. The very key principles behind critical thinking, which is required to acknowledge the fundamental flaws in the Church of Satan's ideology, are antithetical to religious sentiments or personal values. A person that voices critique can be expected to be dismissed as either ignorant or a "shit-disturber," a common term against critics within the organization. Sometimes in moments of self-reflection followers may acknowledge that they "have not yet understood" an apparent contradiction.

Followers whose primary interest in the Church of Satan is a fascination with its founder may be impervious to critique for other reasons than religious conviction or personal values. Such followers display cult mentality, and because the ideology has little importance to such people, a devastating critique of the ideology would produce no effect.

Many followers may also feel that they received something genuine from the Church of Satan, even if the goods are intangible. Their \$100.00, their time, and their efforts went to Anton LaVey or The Church of Satan as a gift in return for what they happened to gain emotionally from *The Satanic Bible*. Such followers create an illusion of accomplishment, leading them to feel that they did receive what they bargained for by this specific religion, when they might as easily have received the same emotional gratification elsewhere. The illusion of being part of a group that shares one's ideology is adequate to some, whereas others feel their egos inflated by their membership. If they can display genuine accomplishment in the real world, they attribute it to their membership of the Church of Satan which is most likely inconsequential to their accomplishments. If their accomplishments are faltering in the real world, usually they can boast of a mediocre achievement as a significant accomplishment instead.[†]

Finally, contributing to one's local church is considered common practice in the USA, where the Church of Satan appears to recruit most of its followers. This tradition lessens the suspicion that perhaps the contributor was cheated, because the contributors are usually not accustomed to receiving anything in return but the satisfaction of recognition for the donation.

A critique of the Church of Satan and/or its ideology is thus not likely to produce any resonance among the Church of Satan's followers.

13.2 Non-Affiliates of the Church of Satan

Outside of the Church of Satan there may also be limited interest in such a critique. One possible explanation is the fact that few people would have reason to accuse Anton LaVey of a poorly designed ideology. Disgruntled ex-followers would not happily admit that they believed in something that made little sense, and if only a few ex-followers complain or if they complain about virtually anything related to the Church of Satan, they are not taken seriously; sociologists would not consider it unusual compared to other ideologies and therefore not particularly worthy of mention; and his sworn religious enemies, fundamentalist Christians, accused him of anything with little concern for truth, burying minor offenses among more serious and easily refuted accusations.

The Church of Satan helps downtone the criticism. Disgruntled ex-followers that do object to the Church of Satan's methods are usually explained away by the Church of Satan as people who were never really important in the organization, and who fell by the wayside because they did not have the high standards (implied: the high standards that followers stand to lose by defecting) required to be Satanists. The argument seems thin, however, because these people include individuals that have been more successful on the Satanic scene than most other Satanists, and individuals that were invited into the Magistrate; even Zeena LaVey and Karla LaVey, Anton LaVey's daughters, who were entitled *High Priestesses* of the Church of Satan, were dismissed as insignificant when they eventually defected. If all these people had been that insignificant, they would hardly have achieved their high ranks. Those that receive the Church of Satan's explanation may not be aware of such facts, however.

But perhaps an even more likely explanation is that of lazy convenience. People tend to judge a person and his achievements by the person's reputation, and drawing on the emotional power of the word "Satan" and the flamboyant, diabolical scenery Anton LaVey became a conve-

[†] Among Satanists, the Internet displays a large number of owners of poorly designed web pages that promote themselves as Web artists; writers of an article or two that promote themselves as authors; guitar players that cannot play for a living who promote themselves as musicians, etc.

nient identification of the embodiment of Satan. If, for example, a person is called “mediocre,” that is what the person becomes for reportorial purposes, and Anton LaVey may have sensed the need to firmly establish himself as an unusual character even if it meant a radical alteration of his past.

13.3 Summary

The persistency of the religion in spite of its inherent contradictions and the many warning beacons can be explained by the commitment and consistency trap, which is well known among marketing experts. It exploits the human tendency to stay consistent with—and even defend—one’s decisions, even if the decisions are shown to be wrong. Once a person finds “a little something” in *The Satanic Bible* or other of the Church of Satan’s publications and subsequently joins the organization, the person has committed himself or herself to the organization, and will be disinclined to deviating from future consistency with this commitment.

Ergo, the ideology is kept alive partly by followers that were deceived, because they act as agents rejecting accusations of an inconsistent ideology using arguments that, lacking tangible evidence, are essentially religious.

Anton LaVey and the Church of Satan are handy metaphors for the Devil for both friends and enemies, and if a journalist or follower of the Church of Satan was to finally admit the truth about Anton LaVey’s organization the journalist or follower would necessarily admit that he missed it all the times before. There is a strong tendency to avoid this, and if it means that as a follower of the Church of Satan one admits to paying a \$100.00 penalty of being duped by a con man, one might be even less happy about it. Besides, it is unlikely that the person would even be heard among the larger group of people that had not made the discovery, because such a discovery, after all, will hardly be a topic for the next episode of *60 Minutes*.

14. Disclosing the Inconsistencies

The Internet boom in the mid-1990s enabled followers of the Church of Satan knowing no other followers in their area to communicate with other followers at the speed of email or via instant messaging in IRC chat rooms[†]. In addition,

the Internet relies on written and hence documentable information. This level of communication between prospective followers and current Church of Satan followers must have boosted the organization’s membership count, but it also made it possible to quickly see so rampant differences between religious convictions that they could not possibly fit under one umbrella religion. In particular, the Internet enabled followers to compare statements from the Church of Satan administration, revealing “form mails,” more or less veiled threats, and a pattern of saying what people want to hear. *The CoS Files* [44] contain numerous examples of the Church of Satan’s interaction with followers and competing organizations.

The Internet provides the Church of Satan with a recruitment agent, but it is also a tool for unraveling the Church of Satan’s methods that was not widely available during the first three decades of the organization’s existence. The lacking interaction between Church of Satan followers until the Internet boom probably explains part of the reason why the scam has remained mostly hidden.

It is perhaps telling that the Church of Satan recognized the Internet’s contribution to growing tension between followers with conflicting ideologies each believing theirs to be Satanic because all ideologies fit the vague definition in *The Satanic Bible*, and issued several recommendations on the Internet and in *The Black Flame* [47] to either stay off the Internet or not debate with those people that one disagrees with. The Church of Satan’s reconciliation today is provided on its Web page:

[S]ince only a very small percentage of our members choose to interact with people online, it would be an error to think that your online experience is necessarily a reflection upon what your personal experience with the Church of Satan might be. [38]

Apparently the author of this disclaimer expects the unfortunate follower to believe that he or she happened to meet just the people that disagree, and that there are plenty of followers that agree lurking in the dark world off-line.

15. Conclusion

The Church of Satan’s ideology appeals to such a wide range of people that the only obstacle to agreeing with it is a potential unwilling-

[†] Instant messaging is an Internet service that enables people to communicate in writing in real time. IRC chat rooms is a special kind that enables several participants to communicate in writing in real time simultaneously, all seeing each others’ replies.

ness to accept the dreaded 'S' word. The wide application of the religion is explained by the fact that its ideology is inordinately ambiguous, fitting just about every conceivable view. *The Satanic Bible* and other Church of Satan documents represent so many opposing views that readers are prone to committing the fallacy of positive instances, causing them to focus on statements that match their opinions and forget the rest: it is known as the Barnum Effect, which is utilized by fortune tellers, charlatans, and other quackery.

Part of the religion suits people who feel lacking in some way, drawing from racist, fascist and Nazi imagery. Ideological scams thrive on such people, who are inclined to accept intangible compensation for their tangible shortcomings.

Titles admitting followers into the priesthood or magistrate are given in reward to those that persuade new followers to join.

Despite its claims the Church of Satan actively recruits followers, and together with a very aggressive defense of its historical name patent is very hostile against other organizations. Followers are expected to antagonize other organizations by direct request from the highest-positioned people in the Church of Satan, including Blanche Barton and Peter Gilmore. This behavior has earned the Church of Satan a significant level of hostility from other organizations. The Church of Satan maintains that other organizations attack the Church of Satan out of envy, but although this may be the case in many situations, it is not a catch-all excuse. There are examples that attacks were initiated by the Church of Satan in the form of intimidation and harassment, and that counterattacks on the Church of Satan were motivated by several stones first cast by the Church of Satan.

Anton LaVey's alternate past is irrelevant for any ideology and must have served a purpose that a professed ideology alone could not satisfy. It appeals to a fan club or personality cult mentality, which is a strong motivation to join for many people.

Several of the indications that the Church of Satan deliberately deceives its members can of course be explained otherwise. For example, the detailed information required for active membership might be genuinely used to match followers in groups with optimal productivity.

In addition, the Church of Satan's membership exhibits typical religious behavior. It may therefore be incorrect to conclude that the Church of Satan necessarily has ulterior motives such as monetary or other reasons. It is more likely that the followers of LaVey are not different from other people in the New Age climate, such as a scientologist or a Sai Baba follower, considering that their behavior snugly fits the pattern of those people.

Finally, Anton LaVey's original home study group evidences that there was, at least in the beginning, genuine interest, and that the ambiguity of their ideology compiled in *The Satanic Bible* was an accidental result of either implied agreement, sloppiness, or a too aggressive deadline.

Yet, LaVey's fascination with con artists and familiarity with their methods should be considered, especially because the fabrication of a fantastic past is completely unnecessary for an ideology and useful only for religions and personality cults, and for duping unsuspecting victims. The two-faced policies of the Church of Satan and its very hostile stance towards organizations competing for followers seem out of place for an organization claiming to desire people with high clarity only. Belief or disbelief in Satan, although a rather fundamental issue for the religion, has been claimed alternately, the answer determined by who was asking. Active recruitment is denied but encouraged and practised nonetheless. The ambiguity of the Church of Satan's religion today (mostly in the form of encouraging personal eclecticism) and the two-faced policies employed by the Church of Satan seem deliberate.

There is ample evidence that the Church of Satan has a very strong interest in gaining followers uncritically of their ideological dispositions, and that it actively prevents other groups from gaining any. At a high membership fee of \$100.00 memberships may not be an exceptionally profitable business, but it is money nonetheless. These facts suggest that the Church of Satan's interest in followers is in part based on an interest in profit. This speculation is underscored by Michael Aquino's documentation, which indicates that Anton LaVey lost interest in the Church of Satan and attempted to turn it into a cash cow instead.

This all leaves little doubt that the Church of Satan deliberately attempts to fleece gullible

victims. If not intentional from the very beginning, certainly this is what the Church of Satan eventually became. The current administration of the Church of Satan clearly uses two-faced policies and double-talking, and encourages hostility against other Satanic organizations.

The reason that the Church of Satan's operation and inconsistent ideology have gone unnoticed can be explained by psychological effects that cause people to be consistent with earlier errors, even when proven wrong. In addition, followers of different opinions seem to have been kept from each other. This is supported by observing that while Michael Aquino's group considers 1975 a turning point in the history of the Church of Satan, apparently many other groups did not notice any change. It was not until followers began to communicate in writing via the Internet that the many conflicting statements by the Church of Satan became very clear.

It is inconsequential whether the Church of Satan's methods morally objectionable. It is also inconsequential that the Church of Satan's religion is inconsistent and tends towards hypocrisy, because from a sociological point of view such incongruences do not disqualify an ideology or a religion if they are accidental or results of intellectual shortcomings. The noteworthy conclusion is that the Church of Satan today *intentionally* provides a rubbery religion and claims to be the foundation of nearly any ideology that (paying) followers happen to agree with.

The Church of Satan is yet a young organization that has had very limited time to formulate an ideology. It is an unfinished product, which will either evolve (for example, via breakaway factions) or die. It is perhaps ironic that the many organizations that have broken off from the Church of Satan to practise their particular understanding of *The Satanic Bible* and other documents may be the very ones that, in contrast to the Church of Satan, have genuine ideologies to offer: ideologies that do not embody opposing interpretations with the intent to deceive the followers.

16. Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Amina Olander Lap for her careful reviews and her clarifications on the dynamics of religious behavior. I would also like to thank Michael Aquino and the reviewers

of this article for their corrections and suggestions.

17. Revision History

The following revisions have been made since this article was first issued:

- Section 1.4, *Lacking Rituals*: there was in fact no funeral ceremony or ritual available; the "celebration of death" ritual originally referred to was not intended for funerals.
- Section 8, *The 1975 "Turning Point"*: Burton Wolfe's book ends with a description of the Church of Satan in 1970, providing a simple explanation why Michael Aquino was not mentioned in the book.

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